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Is Responsible Parenting Our Children's Education?





Ministry
of
Education

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Who's Responsible for Our Children's Education?



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Most people—whether they're eight years old or eighty-five—have their own ideas about education.

"They should teach more French in the schools."

"They should concentrate on teaching English."

"They should spend more money on education."

"They should spend less money on education."

Maybe "they" *should* do some of these things—or none of them. But have you ever wondered who "they" really are? After all, you can't find out what "they" are doing—or why—unless you know which "they" you mean.

The educational system in Ontario isn't controlled by one person or one group. "They" are many people, with a wide range of responsibilities, skills, and types of training, working to help educate the children of this province. Here's a brief guide to who does what in Ontario education, so the next time you have an idea, a question—or a criticism—you'll know which "they" you want to talk to.

The Ontario Ministry of Education has the overall responsibility for the education of children in the elementary and secondary schools of the province, from Kindergarten to Year 5 of secondary school (Grade 13). Its aim is to ensure that equal educational opportunities are provided for all students in Ontario, and that the system responds to the needs of each individual. The Ministry of Education works toward this objective by:

- developing general educational policy for the schools of Ontario;
- providing about 60 per cent of the money spent on elementary and secondary school education in Ontario;
- setting standards for the training of teachers in Ontario, and for evaluating the qualifications of teachers trained outside the province;
- providing guidelines for the development of specific courses by teachers;
- maintaining nine regional offices to ensure that the largest and smallest school boards in the province have equal access to highly trained resource personnel.

School boards are elected by local citizens to manage the day-to-day operation of the schools in a particular area or community. A school board carries out its responsibilities through a director of education and other supervisory officers hired as local board officials. There are 198 school boards in Ontario; each is responsible for hiring personnel—principals, teachers, teaching specialists and consultants, cafeteria workers and custodians. Local boards are also responsible for building new schools and repairing old ones, and for assessing and meeting the educational needs of the community. Some of these needs are language instruction for immigrants, special classes for gifted or exceptional children, and athletic or cultural programs.

Within provincial guidelines school boards also set budgets for the operation of schools within their jurisdiction. Through local taxation, school boards raise about 40 per cent of the money spent on elementary and secondary education in the province.

School principals are responsible for the operation of individual schools. A principal is an experienced *educator* who can provide professional guidance and support to the teacher who needs them; an *administrator* who ensures the smooth physical operation of the school (its safety and maintenance) and participates in the process of hiring teachers; and a *troubleshooter* who makes sure that teachers have the needed equipment to do the best possible job. The principal is also the school's link to the area it serves—the person who makes sure that the school is playing its full part in the life of the community, whether that involves an open house, the presentation of a play, or a visit to the local senior citizens' home.

Teachers are the front line educators: men and women who must be responsive to the needs, the strengths—and the limitations—of each child in the class. The teacher is the person who tries to determine why Johnny finds reading difficult and what steps may be taken to help him. There are two key ingredients that go into the making of a good teacher: knowing how to teach a *child*, and knowing how to teach a *subject*.

You, if you're a parent, also have a vital role to play in your children's education. You're the most important influence in their lives, more important than friends, television, books, movies—or teachers. If *you* think that education is a "waste of time," so will your children. If *you're* tense and anxious about their work,

they'll worry too. All parents have an obligation to maintain a realistically positive attitude toward the education their children are receiving. If you have any questions or doubts—and let's face it, education, like any other system, can always be improved—you should talk to the teacher or principal in your child's school. And if you don't get the answers you feel you need, call your local school board office.

Whether or not you have a school-aged child, there are other ways in which you can become involved in the education of *all* children.

- Check with your local school or school board and find out whether you can be a volunteer teacher aide. With the emphasis on individual attention, many teachers, especially in the larger schools, would welcome your assistance.

- If you have a special skill—if you're a baker, a business person, or a policeman, or are experienced in handicrafts—your nearby school may be delighted to have you explain your work to its students.

- More and more educational outings take place in Ontario every year—whether it's a tour of a local factory, an all-day visit to a nearby conservation area, or a trip to see Parliament in action.

Teachers often need the assistance of adults who can supervise children on such occasions.

In addition to directly helping your local school, you, as a parent, can perform a valuable service for the community at large by becoming a member of a home and school association or a similar group and promoting co-operation between the two vital areas of a child's life.

If you have any other questions about what "they" are doing—or what *you* can do to help—we hope this brief guide to education in Ontario will direct you to the nearest person who could assist you with some answers. If not, an official in the Regional Office of the Ministry of Education will be happy to help.

Regional offices of the Ontario Ministry of Education are located in the following cities:

Thunder Bay (475-1581)

Sudbury (566-3480)

North Bay (474-7210)

London (472-1440)

Waterloo (885-0440)

St. Catharines (684-1123)

Willowdale (Toronto 491-0330)

Kingston (546-2641)

Ottawa (225-2230)

